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# Analyzing deaf artists' artworks: a curriculum for middle school students

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**Analyzing Deaf Artists' Artworks:  
A Curriculum for Middle School Students**

Master's Project

Submitted to the Faculty  
Of the Master of Science Program in Secondary Education  
Of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

National Technical Institute for the Deaf  
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

By

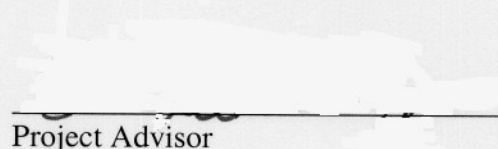
Cheryl Murray

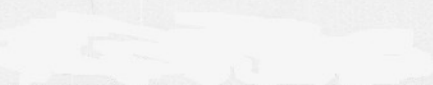
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Science

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## Abstract

This thesis presents a rich context of art information for interpreting artworks of deaf artists. Over the past decade, many artworks have been created by deaf artists. The purpose is to help deaf/hearing children learn about deaf artists and develop critical thinking in a mainstream school. The art curriculum will be presented in Power Point so administrators/educators can have a way to display the art to the students. The background describes how each deaf artist expressed her/his message in their artwork. The curriculum teaches the students how artists use colors, lines shapes, and textures/patterns to express their values and meanings. The curriculum specifically focuses on what Affirmative and Resistance Art is. Students will create their first self-portrait that relates to the art elements that fit their personalities. After they learn Deaf Art, they will draw their second composition to express their view of deafness.

## Project Overview

I developed a creative and exciting PowerPoint presentation that includes images, text, drawings, and quotes. I provided background information for teachers, such as what deaf art means and ways of teaching deaf themes from their artwork. In the PowerPoint, I designed a curriculum project for teachers who do not know, or need to learn more about, deaf art. I have some sample lessons for teachers. Teachers will be able to use my background information and sample lessons to teach students to analyze artworks by deaf artists, so they can gain a greater appreciation of art made by deaf artists. For example, in the beginning of the presentation, this curriculum has an introduction to each artist and a brief biography of the artists. Then, some examples of their work are shown and the type of work they do, such as modern art, abstract, or



contemporary. In this way, teachers will have a better understanding of how to teach deaf art to the students and have them analyze the artwork and the themes expressed.

The project has five parts:

Part I. Background Information for the Teacher and Students. There is an introduction of artists, their biographies and artwork, and analysis of each artwork. Each of their works represents Affirmative, Resistance Art or Art by Deaf people.

Part II. Teaching Students about Design Elements. In the first lessons for the students, the presentation displays different lines, colors, shapes, and textures/patterns. Students analyze what they see and discuss the emotion of the elements in art compositions.

Part III. Self-Portrait Project. After this strategy, students create their own painting such as a self-portrait. When they are done with their work, they analyze the colors, lines, shapes, and textures/patterns and see if they can recognize any emotion in the compositions made by the class.

Part IV. Instruction about Deaf Art. Then the teacher discusses and shows them examples of what deaf art is (Affirmative and Resistance Art).

Part V. Final Composition. Students will draw/paint a second picture after they learn about deaf art. Students will compare their first and second composition. The first self-portrait will show understanding of the meaning of the art elements in the composition. Deaf students will identify Resistance and Affirmative Art in their own self portraits and reveal how well they understand themselves. The hearing students will reveal how well they understand the deaf perspective.

### Importance of the Project

I truly believe that this topic is important to the field of deaf education because students' self-esteem will benefit from knowing how deaf role models express their opinions or thoughts about being deaf through their artwork. Deaf artists also express in their work what they have seen or learned from their lives, and how it felt being deaf when they were little. The students will understand how these artists express their thoughts by choosing colors, and using lines, forms or shapes, textures/patterns to give content to their work. I also believe that students need to know that each artist thinks differently when she/he creates her/his artwork, so it is a good learning art tool for students to develop independent styles. Also, both hearing and deaf students at the middle school level need to learn about the meanings or interpretations expressed in deaf art so they can understand each other, learn about deaf perspectives and have a shared experience. This curriculum provides valuable information about deaf art to educate deaf and hearing children and have them learn skills of art analysis. Right now there are few materials at that level and for that reason we have a need for materials to teach students about art analysis so they will understand the concept of the artwork.

### Project Objectives

The purpose of my project is to help teachers by developing teaching materials for deaf/hearing students to learn about deaf artists and their artwork. Especially, my focus is on how the artists express their messages through their composition.

1. My first goal is to teach deaf students that there are successful deaf role models from the world of art so deaf students will have a connection to them, since these students are also deaf. Deaf artists' artworks are viewed as powerful,

creative, and original. This catches the viewer's attention. Deaf students can look up to these artists and know that they can be successful in any field they desire.

2. My second goal is to use art as a way of teaching deaf/hearing students to use their critical thinking skills, and also teach them how to analyze the components of an art piece, such as color, line, shape, texture/pattern and meaning. This will give them a greater understanding of what an art piece is, and the meaning of the art piece.
3. My third goal is to educate hearing students about the art abilities of deaf individuals and to increase their acceptance of their deaf peers.

#### Review of the Literature

##### Art as an Expression of Emotion

What is art? The word "art" has a lot of different meanings. Art is defined as a fine collection of art, which means people collect a particular kind of art piece. An art gallery is a place where people view artists' artworks. Another meaning of "art" is when an artist, who is creative or artistic, understands the quality of art. Another connotation of art is an art skill, which identifies what a person learns by studying and observing an art element, and defining what it means or represents. There are a lot of art types such as photography, sculpture, painting, drawing, graphic design, ceramics, and printmaking, which are all products of human creativity. Not one art piece is alike or similar; they were all created in a different way by each artist. As a result, it is captivating for anyone to study any art element from the artist's piece and ask himself or herself why this artist



created this kind of artwork. It is revealing for anyone to analyze and comprehend their message as to what the product symbolizes.

"Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, so that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them" (Osborne, 1970, p. 94). Kandinsky, who was well known as the Father of Abstract Expressionism, stated that, "A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer..." (Osborne, 1970, p. 94). The artists express their feelings by throwing out their thoughts or ideas on the canvas, which is similar to a book. Their artworks lead us to perceive their thoughts or ideas as to what they were thinking or giving us a message that we need to comprehend and interpret. "A painting begins to become a book at the very moment it uses lines and colours to relate a story or to describe human emotions, human passions, human thoughts--in short, whatever could as well be expressed by means of words" (Osborne, 1970, p. 104). A book tells a story by using words. A canvas or artwork tells a story by using art elements such as colors, lines, shapes, and textures/patterns to represent meaning. "As has already been said, the emphasis is now upon the creation of 'emotional qualities' which are inherent in abstract patterns of colours, shapes, and lines" (Osborne, 1970, p. 104). "Critics of art and literature often refer both to 'manners of treatment' and to 'compositional patterns' as to 'styles.' This usage is inaccurate, for style is, as we shall see, a function of the work of art *as a whole*, that is, of its medium, form *and* content, fused into a complex artistic organism" (Greene, 1947, p. 144).

This is how the critics analyze these kinds of art styles to understand the concept of any art form that was made by the artists. With any kind of artwork, we, people, need to concentrate on their artwork and analyze why the artist used his/her kind of art style to display her/his art piece. Subsequently, we would be able to understand the art style and appreciate it greatly. "Belief that the art work expresses the character or the emotions of its maker does not give grounds for differentiating the fine from the poor or indeed for the expenditure of time and energy on appreciation. It would rather seem to be structure and form, elements of creativity, which constitute the difference" (Osborne, 1970, p. 99). "In short, a work of art is an organic whole comprising that unity of the ideas and elements *and* the relationships between them which gives significant meaning to them all" (Greene, 1947, p. 142).

"They do embody equally precise articulations of basic moods of feeling, and they are connected as congruent or conflicting with the emotions of life (which may be expressed equally by depicted figures) by the common element of feeling mood" (Osborne, 1970, p. 107). Any art piece does connect to emotion of feelings that were created by artists. Artists create their piece of artwork by her/his feelings depending on their mood. We analyze by observing whether the art is depressing looking or ecstatic looking, therefore we would know how the artist feels or wants to express her/his thoughts in her/his works. "Perception of formal aesthetic qualities, such as balance, harmony, proportion, fitness, may also be mediated by feeling" (Osborne, 1970, p. 109). Any artwork has its own balance and volume as to how much detail or what kind of elements the artist adds in her/his work. All artworks have their own aesthetic qualities that show their personalities. "That art can have therapeutic effects and can be used for



this purpose there is no reason to deny" (Osborne, 1970, p. 113). When I taught Deaf Art to deaf students at Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, I felt that it was an excellent art therapy for them to express how they feel being around deaf people who have different cultures compared to hearing people. I believe that it is important for them to let their feelings out and express their meaning on canvas as part of their therapy.

### History of Deaf Art

Deborah Sonnenstrahl (2000), who is a deaf artist and art professor, researched deaf artists' lives, education, and artworks from the Colonial to Contemporary time. She stated how deaf education and deaf art have gradually changed from the past to the present time. Sonnenstrahl focused on deaf artists who majored in painting, sculpture, and photography, and explained what their works symbolized. For example, she found that Colonial artists did not express their deafness or speak out for what they believed in, but Contemporary artists expressed their deaf perspectives, metaphors and insight, beliefs, and thoughts from their environment.

Ironically, there was a famous artist named Francisco de Goya from Spain who became deaf at the age of 46 during the Colonial time, and was one of the first deaf artists to express his emotions and thoughts through his work. At first, while he was hearing, he used his art style of decoration, called Rococo, that was more related to real life and he used bright colors that symbolized realism. After he became deaf, his paintings depicted more creativity and moved to a Romantic style. Romanticism is defined as more feeling and emotion than form and aesthetic qualities. He expressed his bitterness and frustrations of being deaf. He noticed that hearing people looked at deaf people differently and deaf artists did not receive as much attention as hearing artists did. "His

personal life changed, too. He no longer cared about luxury" (Carroll & Mather, 1997, p. 59).

Interestingly, Goya learned fingerspelling so he could communicate with hearing people. When he became deaf, he felt isolated and his artworks showed a lot of metamorphosis which explained why he changed his art style from Rococo to the "emotional catharsis of Romanticism" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000, p. xvii) to express his feelings toward his deafness. It is understandable that his works changed metamorphically after he became deaf. He revealed his feelings about "the abuse of outcasts, different people, deformed people and children" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000, p. 335) in his artwork. He was a great influence on future artists because "Goya was not one great artist, he was 20 great artists, a famous French art critic wrote" (Carroll & Mather, 1997, p. 60). He changed the world of art forever.

One example is the artwork named, "Milan, Italy, 1880," by Mary Thornley. Goya painted a well-known painting called, "The Third of May, 1808", which portrays "three groups of Spanish people facing a French firing line. Goya divided his group into three sections; a group of dead people lying on the ground, then a group of people facing the soldiers, and the last group of victims marching to their lives' end" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000 p. 335). Thornley got her idea from Goya's work for her artwork, "Milan, Italy, 1880," symbolizing the banning of American Sign Language. It occurred when there was a big convention about whether deaf children should use sign language or oralism. Alexander Graham Bell influenced educators to use oralism so the vote was "one hundred sixty three hearing educators against one deaf educator" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000, p. xx).

Thornley displayed her work to portray how ASL was banned after the educators voted for oralism. The painting by Thornley was described by Sonnenstrahl (2000, p. 333):

ASL faces a firing squad and the letter A is painted in a cold tone of blue. The next letter, S, is half cool and half warm, and the remaining letter, L, reveals a bright yellow. One interpretation of this color scheme refers to the death of the first letter and the second letter is dying and the third letter has not been shot--yet.

It is understandable that deaf artists during the Colonial time were not well known, and hearing people perceived them as "senseless and incapable of reason" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000).

After Goya's expression of his bitterness and frustration of being deaf in his artworks, there were not many deaf artists who articulated their feelings for a century and a half. There were no museums, art galleries, art schools, or large deaf communities, and American Sign Language was not well known at that time. Only a few deaf artists were recognized if they were from a well-off family and they were well educated. Deaf artists from poor families who couldn't write or speak were looked down on by the hearing society. Therefore, there were not many well-known deaf artists back then.

In 1971, Betty Miller's artworks came along in which she expressed her feelings about her deaf experience. Her works roused deaf artists and motivated them to create their own deaf experience in their artwork. She wanted to advocate letting the world know that there is a theme called Deaf Art. On that account, she and eight visual deaf artists formed a group named Spectrum in 1977, where deaf artists could meet and discuss if there was a "Deaf Art" or not. Two summer festivals were held during 1977 and 1978 and they had many workshops since then. "Workshops served as a think-tank



for deaf artists to explore the differences between art by Deaf people and art about deaf people" (Durr & Grcevic, 2000). Unfortunately, this idea never came to any formal decision so finally, in 1989, they held a four-day workshop at Gallaudet University to focus on what Deaf Art was.

The main purpose of the meeting was "to have an in-depth discussion on our experiences as Deaf artists, debate any common elements of Deaf Art, develop a visual manifesto, and develop a written manifesto" (Deaf View/Image Art, 2000, March 15). After this main discussion, they finally came up with the idea what to name the Deaf Art. They declared it De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art). "The name, De'VIA, evolved out of much discussion on the relative merits of an English or an ASL name. The final name, a combination of the two, has the natural flow of ASL as the predominate consideration" (Deaf View/Image Art, 2000, March 15). "'The sign for De'VIA embodies the Deaf characteristics or elements in art' (Sonnenstrahl 1996: 132)" (Durr, 1999-2000, p. 50).

Miller is labeled the "Mother of De'VIA." Durr summarized Sonnenstrahl's opinion of Miller: "Dr. Miller is often cited as one of the first public Deaf artists who clearly incorporated Deaf themes into her artwork, although many speculate that Goya and other less well-known artists created Deaf View/Image long before this movement was identified" (Durr, 1999-2000, p. 49). Miller wanted the world to be aware that there is still Deaf Art and for that reason she wanted to set up a genre for deaf artists so they can be heard; then the society would be aware of Deaf Art.

Susan Dupor, a deaf artist, said, " I feel unfortunate that the Deaf Art has not received any attention in the mainstreamed art world. Many minority arts such as Latino, African-American, Gay and lesbian and feminist art are gaining their respects but Deaf

Art is largely neglected" (Durr, 1999, pp. 50-51). She felt that Deaf Art was unheard of and it needed to be advocated to let people know that there is Deaf Art by both Deaf artists and hearing artists who are involved with deaf experience.

#### Art by Deaf People vs. De'VIA Art

Actually, there are two different kinds of two art groups, which are "Art by Deaf People" and "De'VIA." Art by Deaf People is created by artists, who are not related to deaf experience. In De'VIA, the art is related to deaf experiences such as deaf metaphors, deaf insight and deaf perspectives associated with the environment and everyday life. That includes "a centralized focus, with exaggeration or emphasis on facial features, especially eyes, mouths, ears, and hands" (Deaf View/ Image Art, 2000, March 15). De'VIA also consists of hearing people who have deaf parents or have some experiences with deaf people.

Patricia Durr (1999-2000) described how deaf artists' works reflect Resistance and Affirmation themes, which are also found in hearing artists' works. Durr herself is a deaf teacher in the National Technical Institute for the Deaf's Cultural & Creative Studies Department. She researched the meaning of D/deaf artists and their artwork in her article. Durr mainly focused on two categories, which are Resistance Art and Affirmation Art, which are related to Deaf View/Image Art. Durr reviewed how deaf artists perceived themselves through their artwork. As an example of Affirmation Art, Miller painted "Birth of a Deaf Woman." In her piece, she used pride, beauty, and womanhood. Dupor painted "Family Dog," which is an example of Resistance Art. In her piece, she used disability, no identification, isolation, and lack of communication. This PowerPoint curriculum includes examples of Affirmation and Resistance Art.



### Art by Deaf People

As I researched two different kinds of groups, Art by Deaf people and De'VIA, I interviewed two deaf artists, Dotty Scharschu and David Prusinski. They both produce Art by Deaf People because their work is not related to deaf experiences. Last February I interviewed Scharschu while I was an intern at Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. She was my cooperating art teacher. She is also a deaf artist. Scharschu was born in the small town of Williamsport, Pennsylvania on May 13, 1947.

I found it a fascinating experience to work with her and learn from her. I asked Scharschu what inspired her interest in art. She replied that when she was a youngster, she felt lonely because she could not hear so she started to visualize art (personal communication, February 27, 2004). It made her eager to learn how to draw and understand art and the meaning of it. It made her feel more content with her life. She has been drawing and painting all her life since she started learning about art. Scharschu voiced that her father was her role model because he influenced her to draw everything, and he would make funny faces to make her laugh. He gave Scharschu motivation to draw unusual subjects, not the typical art as everyone did in the classroom. That's when she developed more ideas for her drawing. Scharschu mentioned that when she visualized fire in a fireplace, she drew flames as people. That was an imaginative form of art for her.

Another sketching that she drew was a funny picture of her principal with a long neck with an apple shape sticking out of his neck. The principal saw it and loved it! He kept it in his office, which was flattering to her. She also made a collage out of pheasant

feathers, which had belonged to her father's pheasant. She received several country fair awards.

She likes a challenge for her projects. Her goal is to teach students to be open with art and feel free to express new ideas. She feels much satisfaction in accomplishing all of the goals she has set for herself. The curriculum project includes some of Scharschu's work, focusing on a book that she illustrated and her painted alligator chair.

David Prusinski, one of the two deaf artists that I interviewed, is a visiting teacher at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. He was born deaf in Ohio. I asked him what motivated him to be interested in art. He replied that it had nothing to do with his deafness; he has loved the nature of art since he was a small child. During that time, he collected comic books and illustrated some drawings from what he read or studied.

Prusinski's whole family is deaf. He attended an oral school in Ohio until he was thirteen years old. From there, he went to a school for the Deaf until he completed his education. He prefers American Sign Language to oralism and feels comfortable with his communication mode.

Prusinski attended Gallaudet College but did not finish his education there. He worked at a bank for thirteen years. At that time he was not happy with the personal relationship he had, so he decided to enter Rochester Institute of Technology to study fine arts, painting. His main focus was to be a painter. He is open-minded about his sexuality and likes to discuss the interpretation of his works. Prusinski stated that all of his works consist of gay men and their relationships (personal communication, April 5, 2004). I included some of his artworks in my art curriculum and explained what they represent.

There is a deaf artist named Charles Wildbank who focuses on painting, which looks more like photorealism. His works are also examples of Art by Deaf People. He generally concentrates on flowers such as irises, lilies, roses and exotic blossoms (Elion, 1991/Winter). He uses oils and acrylics as his media for his artworks. Wildbank mentioned, "Flowers can be powerful metaphors, sexually charged. Flowers are symbols of love and procreation and even death" (Elion, 1991/Winter, p. 7). It made me wonder about my paintings of flowers. Perhaps my paintings also represent nature and a symbol of love and appreciation of life. There is one statement from Durr's article (1999-2000) which stated, "Georgia O' Keefe's graceful paintings of flowers and still-lives to represent the beauty and the sexuality of women are notable examples of affirmation art within the Feminist Art Movement" (Durr, 1999-2000, p. 49). That could be about the nature of sexuality and the symbol of beauty. I use bright colors and soft forms to show the beauty of sexuality. It was appealing to read other people's opinions about their thoughts of flowers, so that could be the reason why I love to paint flowers. Related to Osborne's book, Wildbank said, "Yes, I can say a whole lot (more) on canvas than in spoken word and feel I have accomplished a genuine sort of communication with enough self-certitude" (Elion, 1991/Winter, pp. 8-9). As I mentioned before, Kandinsky said all artists express our inner and outer soul in our artworks so the audience would be able to analyze or try to understand our messages and what we want them to know.

#### De'VIA Art

Dupor is an example of a De'VIA artist. One of her artworks, titled, "Deaf Dalmatian – 1990," is related to the article named, "The Deaf Dalmatian Controversy: Destroy Them or Raise Them" (Kay, 1994, June). Dupor uses her themes of "conscience



tugging, politically charged images of deaf culture and education, and metaphors of children as animals in her paintings" (Sonnenstrahl, 2000, p. 369). Her painting, "Deaf Dalmatian," portrays a puppy being euthanized because of its deafness. The study found (Kay, 1994, p. 12):

Between 8-12% of all Dalmatian puppies are born completely deaf and 22-24% are deaf in one ear. This is the highest incidence of congenital deafness among the popular breeds of dog, surpassed only by a few rare breeds such as the Catahoula Leopard Dog.

There are some reasons as to why deaf Dalmatians are put to sleep. They are more likely to bite when they do not expect when someone is behind them or they are bewildered out of sleep. People cannot handle deaf dogs when dogs cannot hear their orders or their names being called. On that account, people are frustrated with them. Hearing people have to realize that it takes some time to teach deaf dogs just like deaf people; they have to be patient and learn what kind of methods they should use to teach them. Some deaf people do not grasp or understand concepts as quickly as hearing people. "Hearing people can be really stupid about deafness" (Kay, 1994, p. 14). For example, hearing people would think that they have to speak louder to deaf people, then they would hear more; but that is nonsense. "A dog can't reason or think like us--you just can't say a deaf dog is the same as a deaf person" (Kay, 1994, p. 14). Dupor used this theme in one of her paintings to symbolize her work so we can feel the pain of deaf Dalmatians and think how they feel. It is similar to deaf children that some hearing people do not know how to raise or educate them.

Other examples of De'VIA art are works by Chuck Baird. He is well known as a good friend of Miller. He named her the "Mother of De'VIA." He is portrayed as a cameo in some of Miller's art works. Baird is one of the founders of the De'VIA group. He concentrates on culture and art. "Baird's incorporation of sign imagery is a delightful, and often thought-provoking, feature of his work" (Lang & Meath-Lang, 1995, p. 21). He mainly focuses on color and light. "ASL was always a part of the landscape of his mind, and he immediately began to connect his visual language to his visual world, a motif to appear in much of his mature artistic work" (Lang & Meath-Lang, 1995, p. 19). Most of his works are painted with ASL images.

Lexington School for the Deaf sponsored an exhibit and analysis of 14 deaf artists from the D/deaf community, and described some of their themes on the Internet (Lexington School for the Deaf, 2001). There are many different kinds of art themes that the deaf artists used in their works. Miller used her artworks to depict deaf education as a relationship between oppression and shame. In her artworks, I believe that she revealed how deaf education was abused by hearing teachers in the past when deaf children were not allowed to use their hands. Deaf children were ordered to learn how to speak and listen to words through the microphones. Deaf education hurt deaf children's self esteem and pride because they were not allowed to use their hands when they didn't know how to speak at that time. And now she uses the word "evolution," meaning that deaf people can use their hands to communicate with no limits. Dupor and Baird focused on psychological themes in their artworks to portray how deaf children live in two worlds, the deaf culture and the hearing culture. Deaf children are powerless and must deal with "experience at the hands of their hearing, non-signing families as well as the educational



and medical establishments" (Lexington School for the Deaf, 2001). De'VIA artists fabricated their compositions by expressing their thoughts or opinions about what they had seen or experienced. These artists intend to show the unity, diversity, and variety of their experience. That list of themes guided my analysis of the artists who appear in my curriculum.

Brenda Schertz provided her own description of the development of deaf art in a book about the First National Touring Exhibit of Deaf Culture Art (Northeastern University, 1999-2000). Schertz stated that when she met Dr. Elsa Nunez, the Provost of Lesley College in Boston, sometime after 1995, Schertz showed her slides of artwork by Deaf artists and Dr. Nunez was fascinated with them. Deaf art was not well known by the public in 1995. Dr. Nunez felt that deaf art needed to be made known. Dr Nunez suggested that Schertz and other artists write up a proposal where their works would be known and heard by the public. Schertz originated the Deaf Art Traveling Tour to various places across the country, including National Technical Institute for the Deaf's former Switzer Gallery in February 2000. Schertz identified the themes of identity, a tool of communication, deaf culture, visual communication, visual art, and ASL.

#### Art in Education

David Henley (1992) wrote a book for art educators who need to know how to use appropriate strategies for students who have special needs. He stated that art educators need to speculate on how to approach the teaching of art to children with special needs. He focused on drawing, painting, design and sculpture. One special strategy that he suggested is a sculpture garden or a performance area in whatever place the students can

design and create landscape on school property. This kind of strategy is a good therapy lesson for students to work together as a group on a project.

In the book called, Teaching Art to the Deaf, Kingsley stated that most deaf children have problems learning their language and reading skills. "Using similar kinds of non-verbal tests it has been found that deaf children make higher scores than hearing children on tests of memory, design and tactual memory" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 5). This is because deaf children absorb more when they visualize any elements such as symbols, designs, drawings, and paintings. "Piaget (1963) also sees a child's visual symbols as being 'intimately related to his conceptual growth'" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 5). The hearing child hears things and communicates through his/her language. A deaf child who visualizes symbols or anything pictorially expresses his/her language. This is how deaf children grasp or understand the concept of visual symbols more than hearing children because they can't hear, so they perceive anything that surrounds them to learn their language. An art teacher who works with children in a school for the deaf must be acquainted with each child's ability and knowledge of art so the teacher would know what kind of teaching methods she should use to develop their cognitive mind and have them understand the language of art. The teachers can use their drawing to test for intellectual, emotional, and psychological problems (Kingsley, 1977, p. 8).

There is a variety of communication modes such as oralism, manualism, sign language, fingerspelling, signed English, total communication, and simultaneous method. "During the years when language concepts are being taught to the child, whether by Oral or Manual methods or some combination of the two, art can serve as an additional means of communication. Different theories are held about how communicative deaf children's

art work really is" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 16). It is appealing to see how they convey the language of art in their artwork after they learn their kind of communication mode. The writer (Kingsley, 1977, p. 18) has found that children who came from deaf families or from families with one or more deaf person tend to express more than children who are insecure and unsociable.

It is interesting that "children all over the world use the same symbols in their art work for people, animals, buildings, and other familiar themes" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 22). Art is a good therapy for deaf children because hearing children can speak out about their problems to a counselor or a friend, but deaf children who have inadequate language and lack of communication tend to have problems speaking out how they feel. Art is a way for them to release their emotional feelings, a way of communicating and a way to help them perceive who they are. "Working through the arts also gives any child a means of grasping reality in that it is a reinforcement for the child of what he knows to exist" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 23). "Education based more on visual example than oral language is a difficult process but an art program can provide a means of training a child in the perceptual skills necessary for this kind of an education" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 25). I do believe that art should be offered in every deaf and mainstreamed school so that deaf students can create art to express themselves. "Initiating and executing ideas in arts and crafts gives the deaf child practical experience in problem-solving, reasoning, realistic thinking, and the development of the senses other than hearing (D'Amico)" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 26). That kind of art method can help any child to understand the language of art.



"This project then is not concerned with what art to present to the deaf, but in precisely how to work with that child in art, and why art is so particularly important for him in the first place" (Kingsley, 1977, p. 67). I do agree with this statement because we, teachers, need to meet students' psychological, emotional, and intellectual level to assess their development and learning skills. Art needs to be discussed so students develop their learning art skills. I believe that they should learn and concentrate on art that is related to any subject such as History, Science, or English. One example is a quilt project. Quilts have their own meanings from history, so quilt and history are combined into one subject, not just basic art. Students need to discuss what art is or represents. That would lead them to understand the concept of art and appreciate what they have learned.

For teachers who want to teach art to deaf students, I believe it is important for them to have art certification so they will know what kind of art strategy they should use. "They are by this time certified as such, and the job is usually more prestigious than that as art teacher. In many schools for the deaf art is considered so unimportant that a teacher with academic certification would be chosen to fill an art position before a certified art teacher" (Kingsley, 1977, pp. 69-70). It is not right that the administrators hire teachers who do not have art certification. These teachers who do not have art certification would not know what kind of art teaching skills they should teach or how to meet students' intellectual, emotional, and psychological phases. I would strongly recommend that teachers who want to teach art should have art certification so the students would appreciate art more.

## Deaf Culture

Art teachers who teach deaf students need to know about Deaf culture because their artwork may help the students to describe their upbringing and background and to understand the development of their deaf identity. There is a question as to why there is a deaf culture while there are other cultures that relate to their own morals, language, values, and traditions such as Indian culture, European culture, Japanese culture, and so on; but a deaf culture? It is because deaf people feel isolated among hearing people in the society, so they feel that they need to have their own culture where deaf people can share their feelings and beliefs, understand their values, and have their total support. So, they set up their own culture as a deaf culture where deaf people would feel accepted or belonging to the group so they could share their language and understand how they feel. When there is a deaf culture, "they feel they gain support and trusting companionship from other Deaf people who share the same cultural beliefs and attitudes" (Padden, 1989, p. 10). They also want hearing people to be aware of their deaf culture. Accordingly, their goal is to "achieve public acceptance of deaf people as equals--equals in employment, in political representation, and in the control of institutions that involve deaf people, such as schools and service organizations" (Padden, 1989, p. 6). This way they would have their attention and more help from other services. Deaf people also want hearing people to recognize their communicative language such as sign language or other kind of communication mode.

When there is a deaf community, it often means that deaf people use American Sign Language as their primary communication mode. Meanwhile there are a variety of deaf people who can hear and speak; they may not be accepted by a deaf culture unless



the deaf person "changes the behavior that he/she has always considered normal, acceptable, and positive" (Padden, 1989, p. 11). It is poignant that some deaf people wouldn't accept other deaf people if they communicate in a different way. They should accept any deaf people no matter who they are or what kind of communication mode they use. "Exposed to a culture, Deaf culture, children proceed to learn it. What they learn is a theory of themselves, theory of 'others,' and they learn about the theory 'others' have of them" (Humphries, 1991/Fall, p. 215). It is very common that most deaf people ask other deaf people where they are from or which school they attended. "It is important to Deaf people to ask for and give each other information about where they were raised and which schools--usually residential schools--they attended" (Padden, 1989, p. 12). When deaf people do this, they feel comfortable knowing each other, like they have known each other as friends. That's part of their deaf culture. Culture and language are both important to deaf people. "But the most striking characteristics of the culture of deaf people is their cultural values--these values shape how Deaf people behave and what they believe in" (Padden, 1989, p. 8).

As for Deaf Art, the artists used their themes and symbols in their artworks from what they had experienced in their childhood lives, such as their oral education, conflicts with hearing people, or "oppression of language, signs and fingerspelling, hands and eyes, and world of vision" (Humphries, 1991/Fall, p. 231). "The issue of what constitutes Deaf art is often debated but is probably more a reflection of the debate about what constitutes Deaf culture than of whether there are Deaf artists and whether they have something to express" (Humphries, 1991/Fall, p. 231). Yes, indeed, they do express from their deaf experiences only if they are from De'VIA group, not just producing Art by

Deaf people. Obviously, you can tell by their artworks whether it is Affirmative or Resistance Art. It is very interesting to analyze their works and how they went through their education while they were young and they couldn't speak how they felt. I am glad that Deaf Art is becoming well known around deaf colleges and organizations so we all can become aware of it. That's the reason that I want to teach Deaf Art in both deaf schools and mainstream schools so it would be heard of and hearing and deaf people would be able to feel at ease with each other.

#### Activities

1. I interviewed two deaf artists, Dorothy Scharschu, while I was an intern at Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf last winter, and David Prusinski, at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf last spring. I asked them about their art lives and what motivated them to be interested in art.
2. I researched the art of eight deaf artists and their biographies through personal contact, books, Internet, and articles about art in journals. There are two different groups, which are "Art by Deaf People" and "De'VIA Art." I primarily focused on Affirmative and Resistance Art that is part of De'VIA Art.
3. I developed a PowerPoint curriculum that has five categories. I designed the first component to describe the eight deaf artists and their artworks. The next component teaches about the design elements such as colors, lines, shapes, and textures/patterns. I also wrote about the emotions of some elements. The third component is for students to produce their first self-portrait after they learn art elements. The fourth component is about Deaf Art as Affirmative and

Resistance Art. The last part is for students to create a final composition that is related to art elements and Deaf Art.

4. With all these combinations, I reviewed the literature on art and emotion and Deaf Art. I completed the project by researching and writing about fifteen articles for this thesis.

5. I also prepared a printout of the slides to go with my curriculum.

#### Implementation and Discussion

My future goal is to give the disk of my designed art curriculum to an art colleague and have her/him use it for teaching in her/his classroom. I would be inquisitive to see if it would be successful or not. If it weren't beneficial, then I would discuss with the teacher about her/his experience, such as what kind of problems or misunderstandings the teacher had with my art curriculum. I would revise it and then have the teacher look at it again to be sure that she/he is satisfied with my teaching curriculum. I would want it to be valuable and successful for any teacher to use in the art classroom to teach students art elements and Deaf Art.

After I researched all these sources for my thesis, I found this project to be a worthy, wonderful, and great learning experience for me. When I taught this curriculum at WPSD, I learned that deaf students are interested in learning about Deaf Art. I found these outcomes:

- Students expressed their feelings.
- Students showed their motivation to work on this project.
- Students learned something new about Deaf Art.



- Students built their confidence to "tell a story" about their feelings as a D/deaf individual regardless of positive/negative feelings.
- Students applied the art elements on their D/deaf self-portrait as a way to express their feelings or thoughts through their projects.

I feel so motivated to learn as much as I can because there are a lot of different meanings related to these two terms, Affirmative and Resistance Art. I believe that it is very important for anyone to express their inner and outer soul, and their view or perspective toward handicapped or disabled people. That would help both hearing and deaf students to understand how they feel and, hopefully, they would respect each other and work together at ease.

I haven't had experience with hearing students yet. I will teach hearing students (or CODA) about Deaf Art and have them work like the deaf students did at WPSD in the future. I feel that it is important for me to teach both hearing and deaf students so they can learn from each other and express how they feel toward each other.

While I worked on PowerPoint, there were some technical difficulties. For example, the typeface changed to another typeface, or the size of words changed. Some of the slides would have errors automatically after I saved and closed it. As a result, I am sure some of these errors will appear when teachers use it for teaching. I used all the slides in the same background color because it is more visual and images would be revealed more clearly.

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